HARROW

The MARTYR : Part one

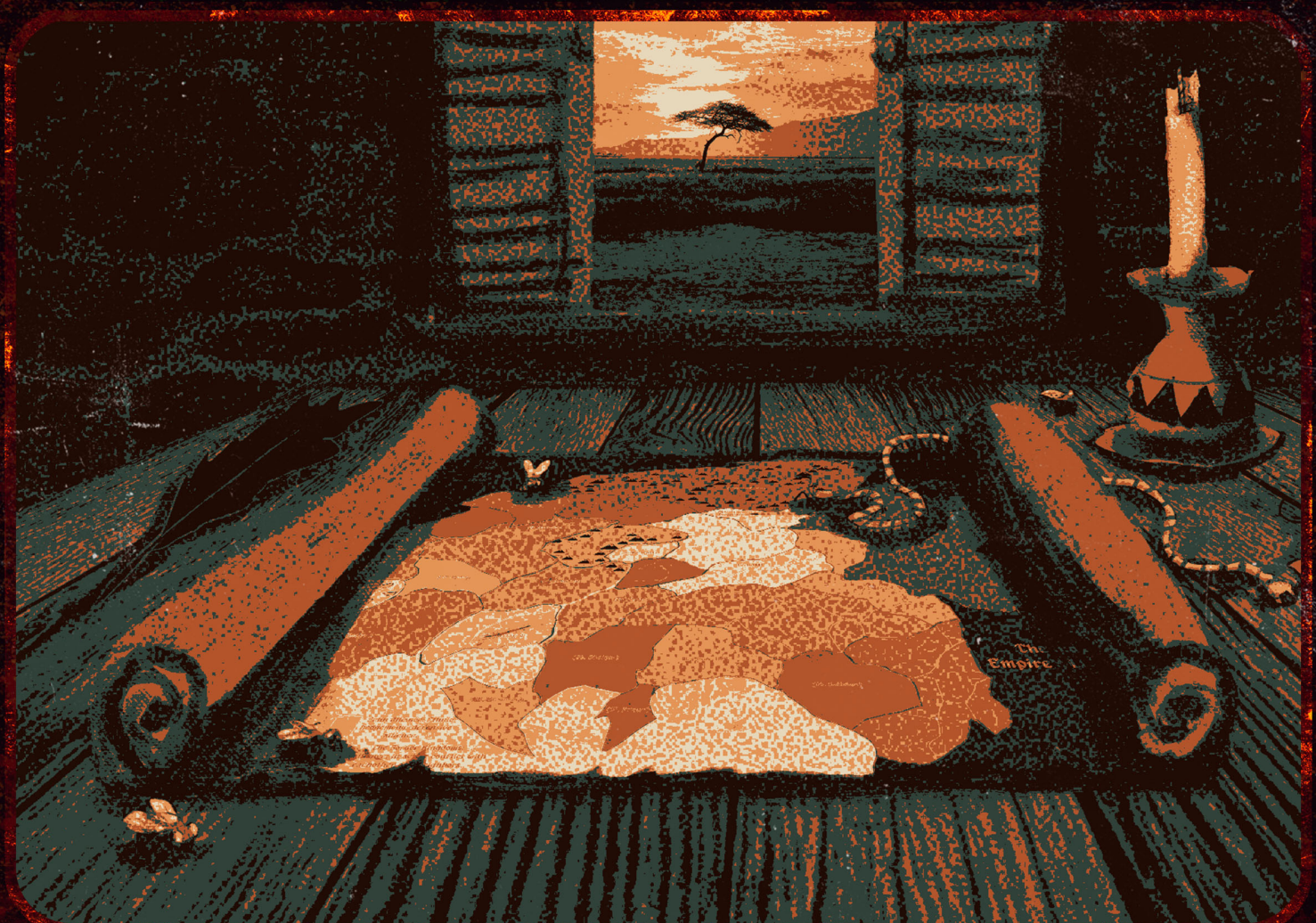
MAJORA · LEE · HEX

All is rot.

The Lands are shriveled. Their creatures, withered and desperate. The Remnant Kings grow more meek each day and their tyranny creates fractures in an already mangled patchwork of crippled civilizations.

The gods are dead. No one worships at their altars anymore.
There is only Mourning, as once hope filled prayers have turned into bloated eulogies; aggrandizing an imagined past.

No longer are things interlinked in a web of synergy. Parasitism; once honored, has grown foul and exploitative. The hope that together, creatures can thrive and ascend, has turned into a paranoia that codependency brings death.



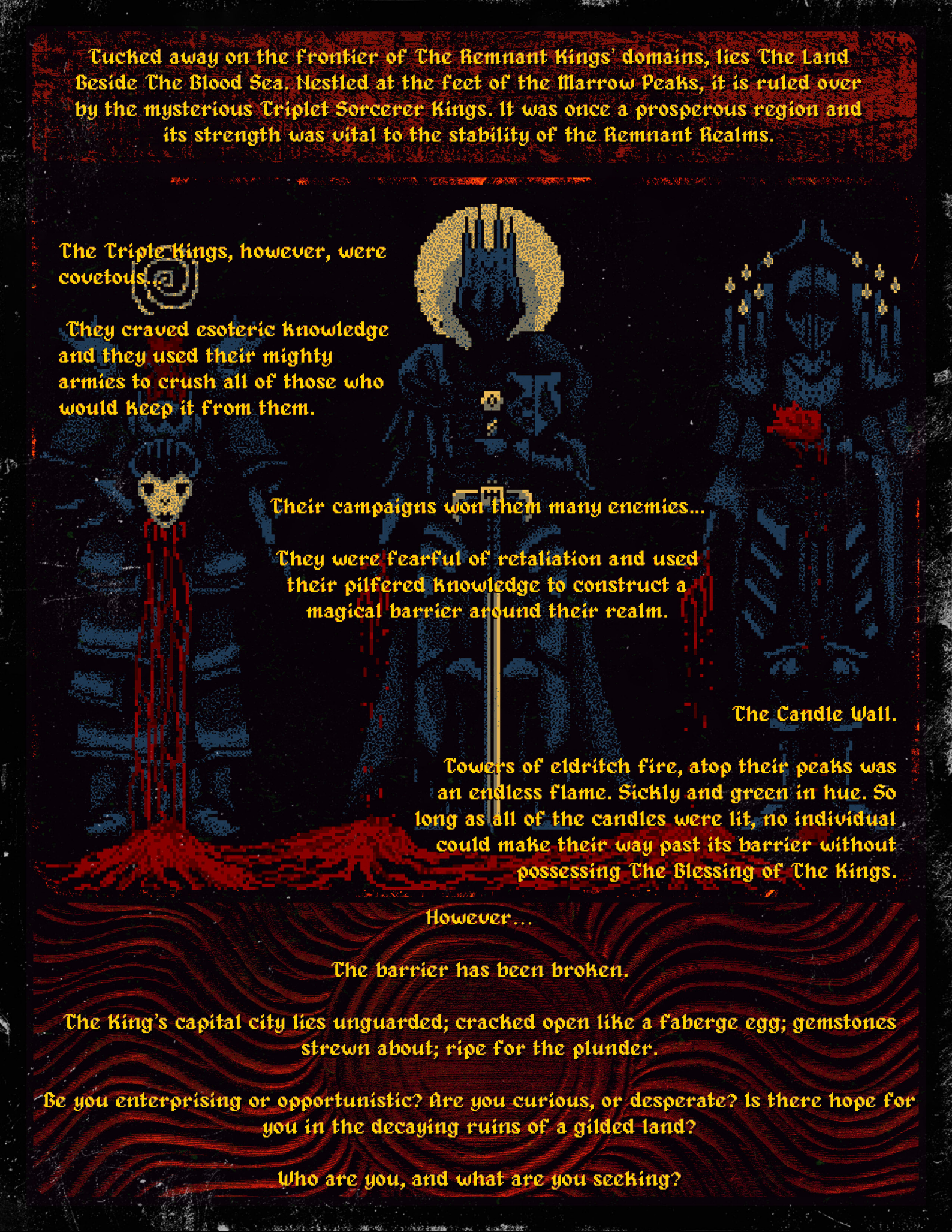
And yet...

The world still turns.

And things

Change.

Tucked away on the frontier of The Remnant Kings' domains, lies The Land Beside The Blood Sea. Nestled at the feet of the Marrow Peaks, it is ruled over by the mysterious Triplet Sorcerer Kings. It was once a prosperous region and its strength was vital to the stability of the Remnant Realms.



The Triple Kings, however, were covetous...

They craved esoteric knowledge and they used their mighty armies to crush all of those who would keep it from them.

Their campaigns won them many enemies...

They were fearful of retaliation and used their pilfered knowledge to construct a magical barrier around their realm.

The Candle Wall.

Towers of eldritch fire, atop their peaks was an endless flame. Sickly and green in hue. So long as all of the candles were lit, no individual could make their way past its barrier without possessing The Blessing of The Kings.

However...

The barrier has been broken.

The King's capital city lies unguarded; cracked open like a faberge egg; gemstones strewn about; ripe for the plunder.

Be you enterprising or opportunistic? Are you curious, or desperate? Is there hope for you in the decaying ruins of a gilded land?

Who are you, and what are you seeking?

THE MARTYR

You spent your life among others.

With people

Living

Loving...

Dying.

As a devotee of the gods that dwell within The House of Entropy, you emboldened the precious souls around you with tales of the god's struggles and triumphs.

This devotional duty fed your own belief in The Will of The Sentient and it allowed you to become a beacon of divine inspiration.

That was... until others felt your convictions were too bold.

An accusation. Perhaps it was true, perhaps it was lie; either way, you faced judgment and were found lacking of innocence.

Upon the executioners block your head did sit, and a prayer escaped your lips. It was not a bargain or plea to be spirited away from that scaffold, but a whisper for a clean and noble death that would perhaps allow you a chance at a seat in the hall of your patrons.

The headsman's axe did fall, and it sliced through your flesh.

But it did not rend the life from your bones.

The blade passed cleanly through your body as a wine colored scar formed to softly choke your neck.

Some onlookers cried out for you to be pardoned. "A miracle had occurred".

Others smelt the scent of witchcraft...

To your misfortune, the fearful folk won the ear of the judge and you were cast out of your home.

You tried... other methods of expiration, but to no avail. It seems you had become afflicted by The Plague of Undeath.

There was no known cure, but there were whispers...

Whispers of a dark land by The Blood Sea... Perhaps you could find what you seek there...

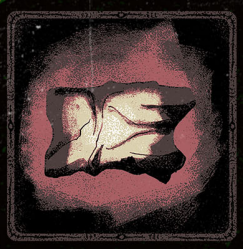
A means to achieve a noble death.

PERSONAL EFFECTS

Paramour's Scent

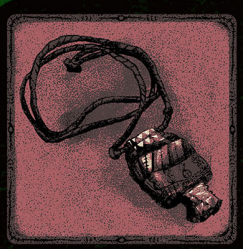
A vial of your former lover's perfume. Though they disowned you upon your exile, you cannot bear to be separated from their scent. It gives you a melancholy sense of comfort. If only you could hold them in your arms once more...

Knuckle Bone of Light



An old fragile knuckle bone. You were told it came from the very hand of Xastras. It exudes an otherworldly light that becomes stronger when surrounded by pitch blackness.

Charm Bag



A charm bag filled with various reagents. As you were being lead to your execution, a close friend dropped it into your pocket. You can tell from the various types of cloth that wrap its exterior that many individuals contributed to its construction. It radiates a faint warm energy and it makes you feel calmer in the face of conflict.

BURDEN:

You cannot die. You flesh mends itself every time you incur fatal wounds.

The bastard lands of the Triple Kings... Never in a million years would I have thought I would journey there, but if there is a chance... I must take it.

You walk.

You walk for days.

Until you see a tower in the distance.

Two towers.

This is the Candle Gate. No door blocks the road.

This is the threshold of The Triple King's sanctum.

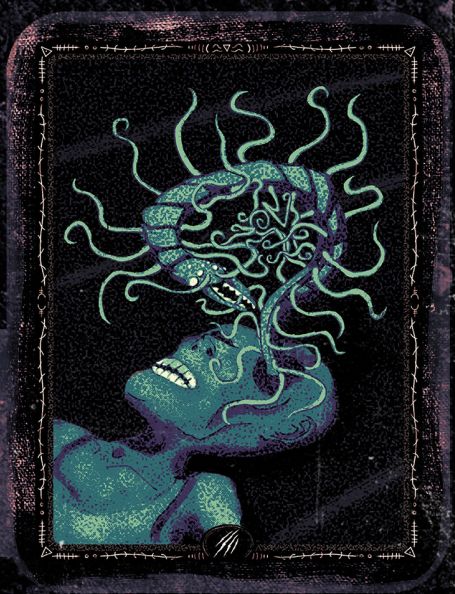
..

You see shadows moving inside the gate house. They peer back at you before they scurry away. You feel it is best to just continue onward...

As you progress, a foul stench forces its way into your being. Wide fields stretch out in every direction beside the road and what should be a fertile plane of life, is instead a blasted and muted wasteland.

Unliving Skulker

A murky creature that lurks in the shadow of foxholes... are they spirits?



Pale Vermin

A skittering creature born from corpses. Their chitin takes on the pigment of the parent body.

Callous Carrion

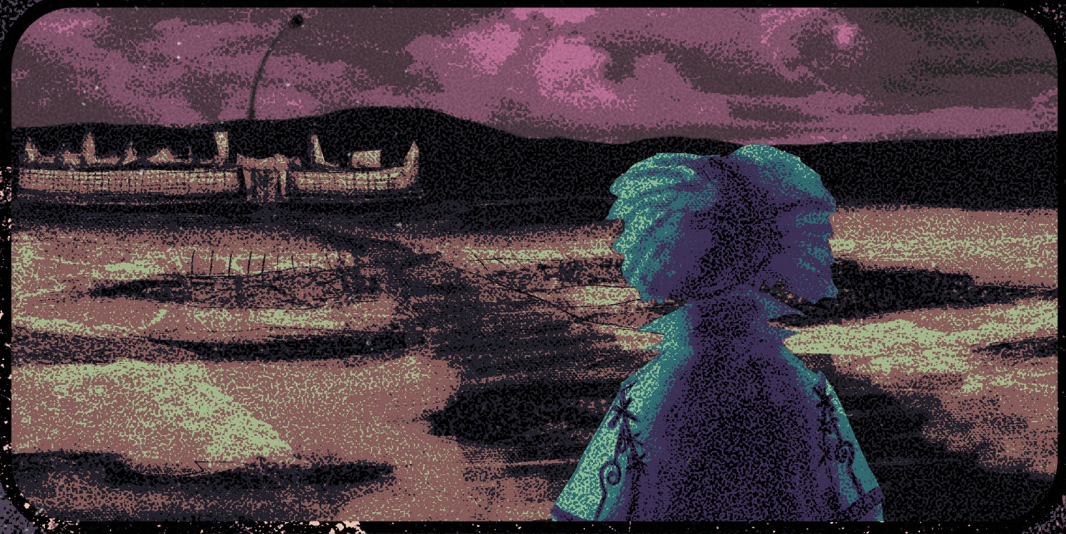
Scavenger Raptors. It has been rumored that they will also carry off stray children...

Dead Haunt

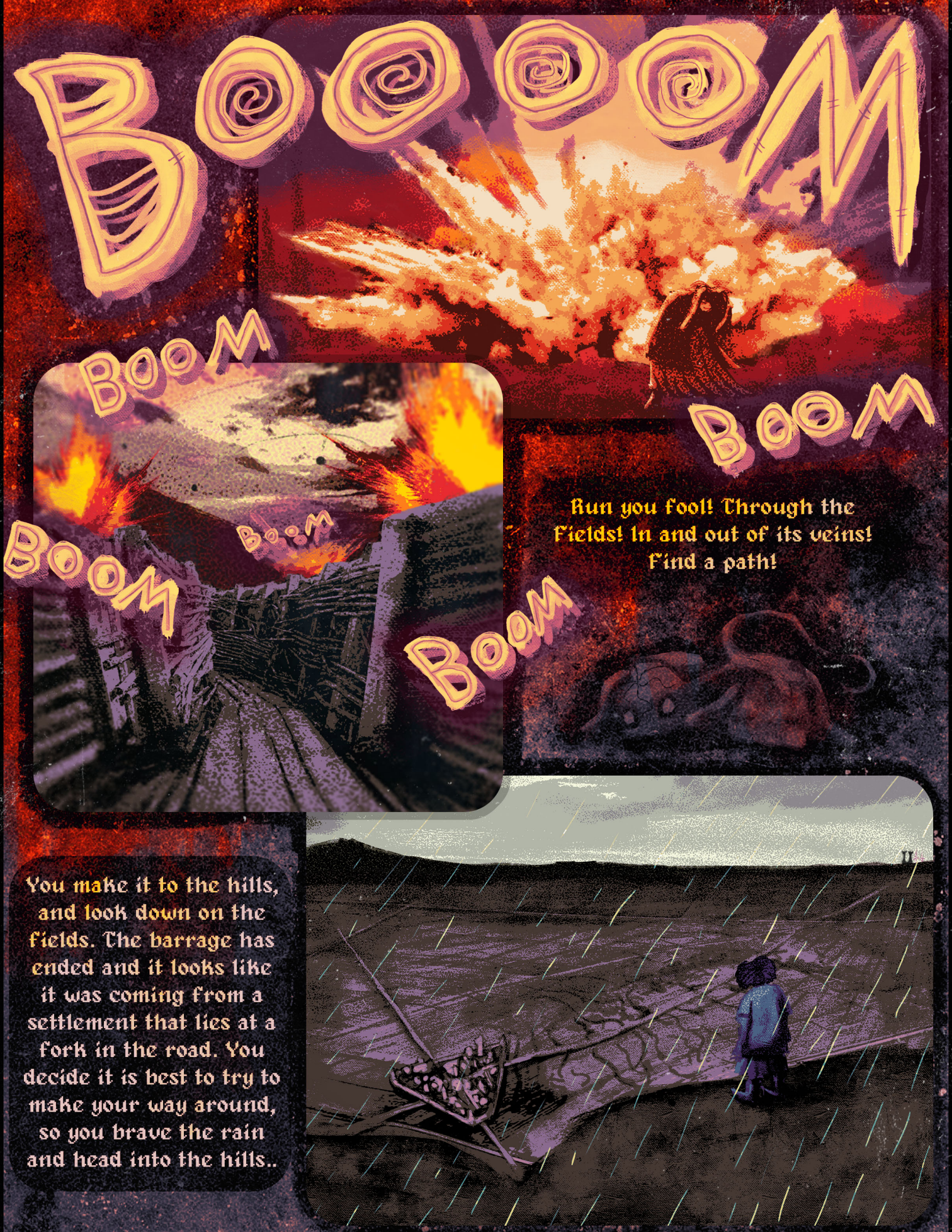
A ghost trapped in an inanimate dead body. It is not known if the spirit is the original owner of the corpse, or a squatter.

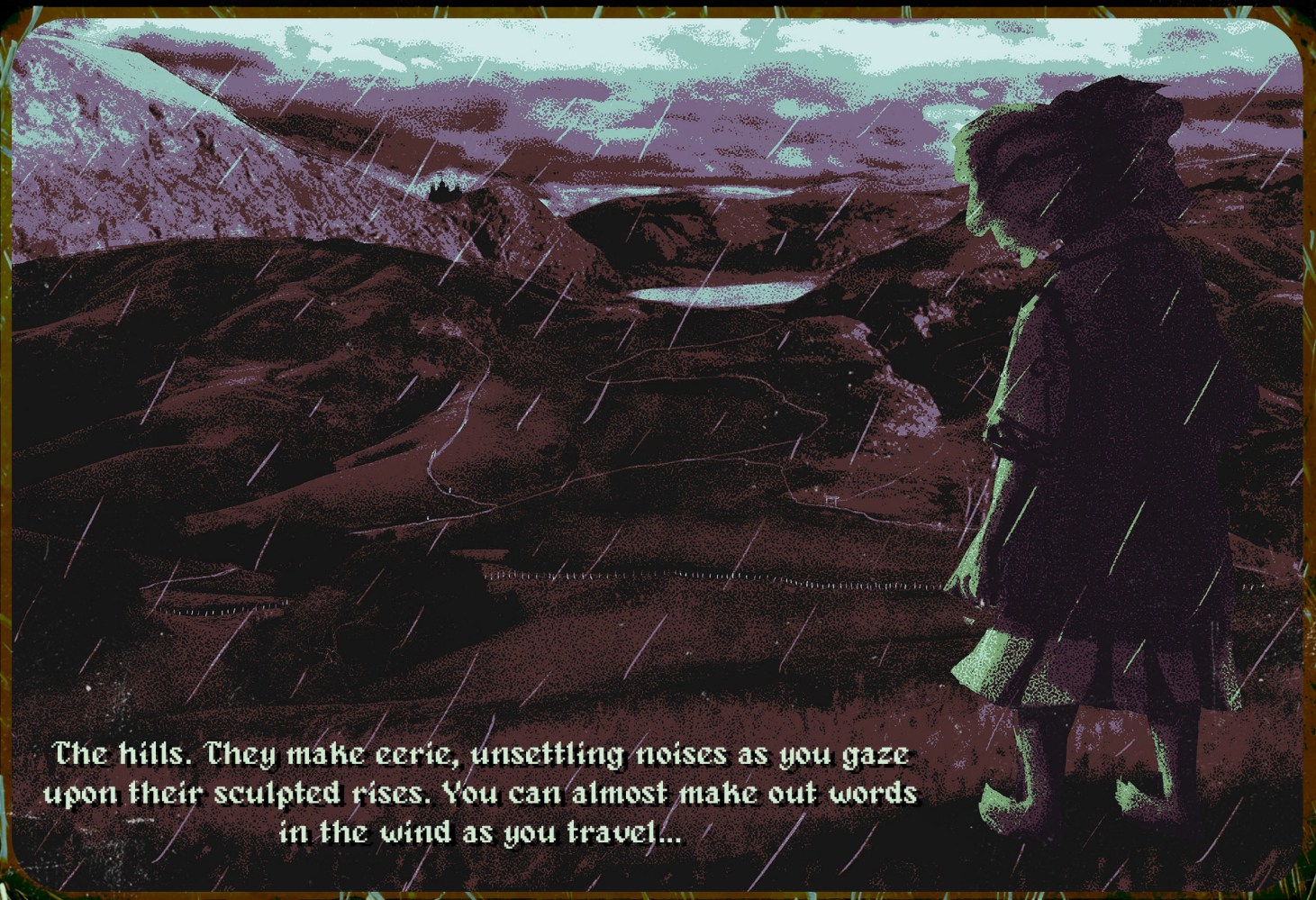
The origin of the stench is revealed to you. The remains of a prolonged battle. Such a sight conjures sadness within you for the poor souls lost in those snaking trenches. However, fear also wells up inside of you as you pass the hollow, mangled faces of the dead soldiers.

On the horizon, you think you spot some structures, but as you slowly make your way towards them, you begin to hear a whistling sound...



Is it, getting closer...?


BOOOOM
BOOM
BOOM
BOOM
BOOM
BOOM
Run you fool! Through the Fields! In and out of its veins! Find a path!
You make it to the hills, and look down on the fields. The barrage has ended and it looks like it was coming from a settlement that lies at a fork in the road. You decide it is best to try to make your way around, so you brave the rain and head into the hills..

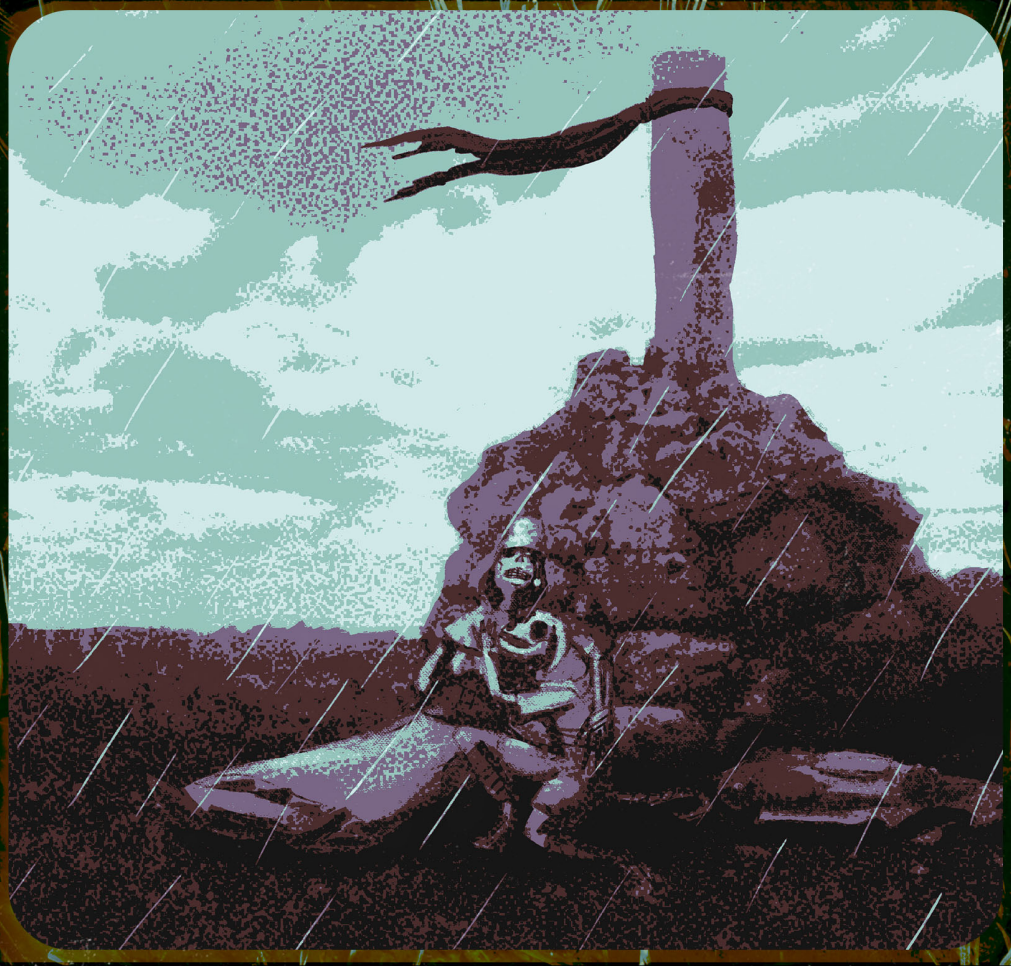


You pass carefully placed stone cairns as you make your way down the winding paths.

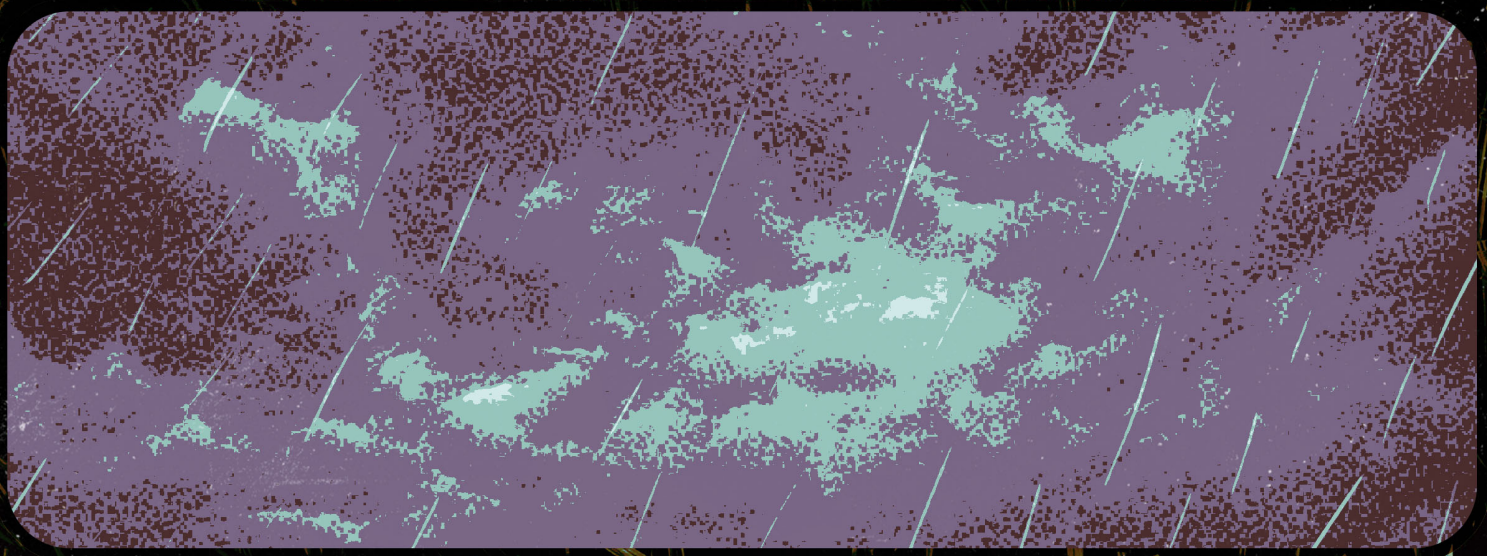
Among them you find two travelers clinging to each other, starring into the heavens.

What cruel sufferings could have brought them to this place?

You will never know, but their sorrow becomes yours...

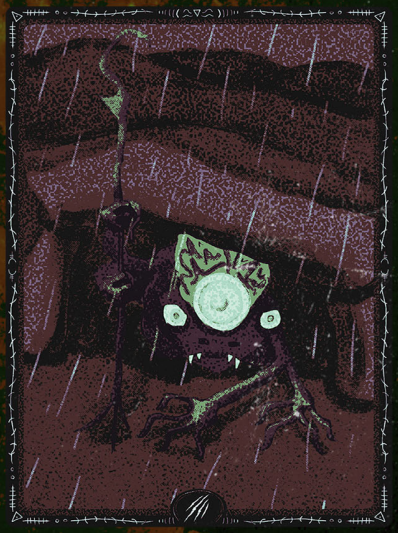


The hills hiss at you as you make your way through their pallid features. There are creatures that stare at your from the murk. Their bodies feel profane to you. Hopefully, you will not have to confront them up close...



Exiled Cyclops

A mysterious ruminant with an elongated neck and one eye. They covet trinkets and jewelry and will sneak into camps at night to steal travelers' valuables.



Barrow Frog

Large amphibians that make their homes in barrows. There is debate as to whether these frogs are sapient or not, as they are not known to posses an understandable tongue. Locals claim the frogs summon the storms to keep their habitats moist.

Puddle Serpent

A spotted reptile that forms out of rain puddles. This create has a visage inside of their mouth that is said to whisper esoteric secrets in an effort to to lure victims into their clutches.

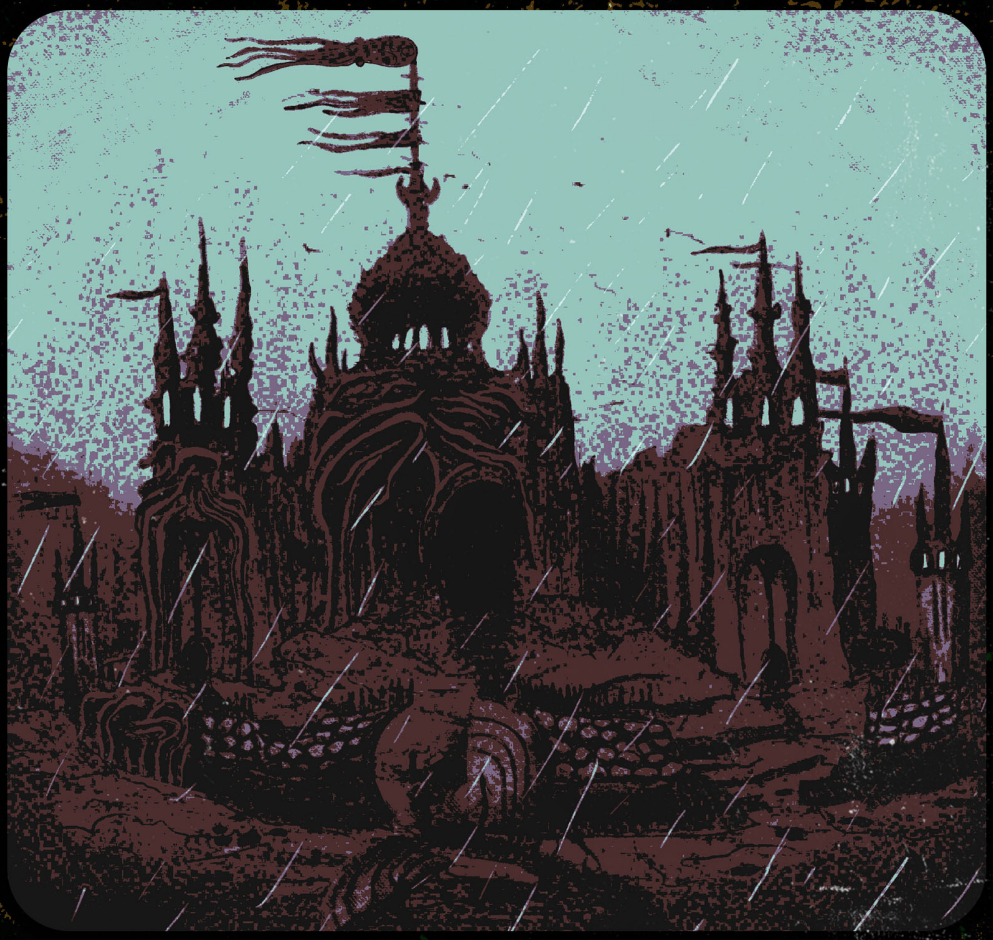
Friendly Strangers

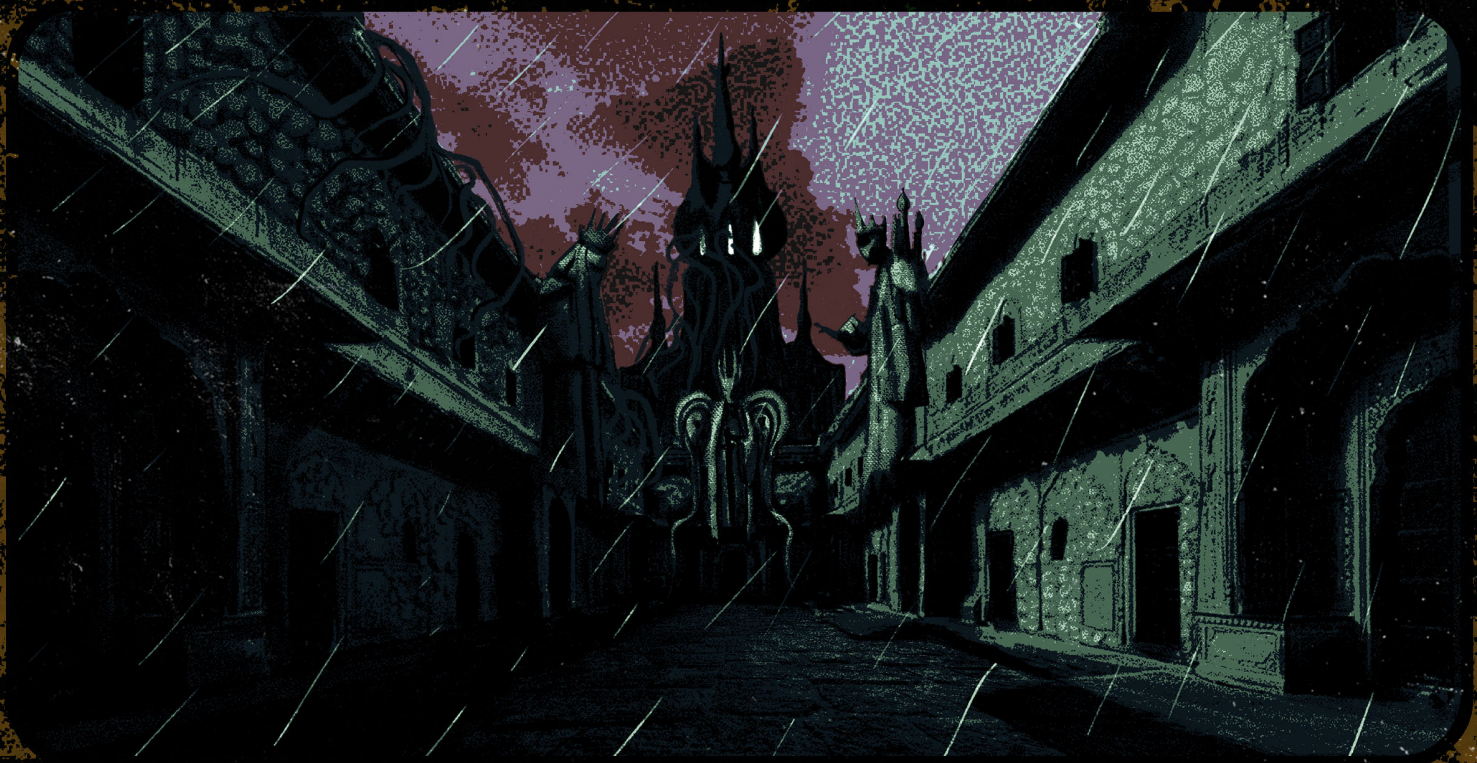
A trio of strangers who hail passing travelers with friendly salutations. They are however, not as they appear and need warm blood to feed their growing young.

You come upon an old structure nestled within the hills. Its seems to be an abandoned fort.

You hear a voice that speaks in words you cannot understand. It is compelling you to enter...

Soaked, and chilly, you decide to listen and take shelter inside. Perhaps the rain storm will pass after some time.





You enter the courtyard at the center of the compound, and notice that there are strange growths creeping over the edifice of the building. Statues line the walls and look down on you with a familiar indifference.

The interior of the fort is cold and hostile in its emptiness.

There is something... uncanny about the hallways.

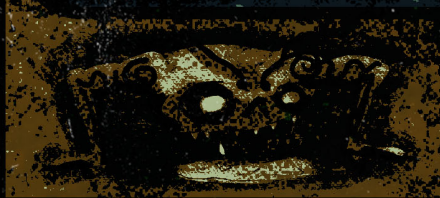
They twist and distort in alien ways.

You have a hard time tracking your progress as you go.

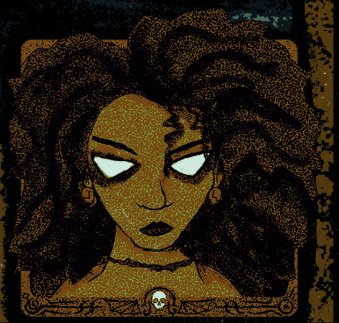
Deep inside, you happen to come upon a chamber with a memorial to one of the dead gods. The large statue sits silent as it looks to the sky.

You are filled with unease as you imagine the hall filled with crying mourners...

You begin to hear their cries the longer you linger.



I do not know which dead god this is, but I hope they are now at peace... There is a... hatred, here...



Though it is abandoned the fort is not empty. There are sallow figures moping through its walls...

Noxious Floater

An eldritch creature that emits a fragrant mist. This mist enthralls onlookers and causes them to fall into a dream-filled slumber while The Floater feasts upon their life force.

Reticent Haunt

A presumed haunt of unusually large size that lurks just out of sight. There were whispers that a traveler was once able to converse with them. It is also said that traveler went on to Ascend.

Veiled Haunt

A haunt with an extremely long veil that merges with the very shadows. If one locks eyes with this being, they will accompany you for the rest of your life; bringing darkness wherever you go.

Weeping Shadow

It isn't clear what this entity is. They grow child-like figures from their saliva, and if they catch you unawares, you will find that you are bound to raise one of the children as your own.

Lantern Haunt

A spirit that inhabits light sources such as lantern. They lives their afterlife in these sources of light, and will hop to any source of light they encounters.

THE WILD IMMORTAL

Deep within, you stumble upon a lit chamber. A strange Alphoraz stands surprised by your presence. Though startled, they beckon you to come closer.

PSST! You *garrrrrrrrrrgrrr*... You are Bold! Are you also looking for a way through to the capital? There is an old tunnel that leads through. *gurrrrgrr* sur*... I think... You seem like an alright sort. I could join you and show you the way. if you'd have me. *rrrrrrrrrr*

PERSONAL EFFECTS

Hive Cudgel

A vespidae hive fashioned into a mace. This hive originates from an alien land, and is only bestowed upon trusted friends. The wasps within bond with their caretaker and will fight to the death to protect them. The guardian wasps also produce a nutritious royal jelly; unlike any found in the known world.

Ceramic Flute

A ceramic flute that produces soothingly sonorous tones. Its gourd-like chambers are fashioned to represent lungs. The notes produced hit a particular resonance that calms the wild hearts of rogue Haunts. Surely, some form of witchery went into its making.

BURDEN: DRIFTERS CURSE

The Wild Immortal has been away from his ancestral pool for too long, and cannot intuit its location. For an Alphoraz, this could spell doom and it is not uncommon for those afflicted to wander the world aimlessly... for eternity.

The tunnels are pitch black and you cannot see an inch in front of your face.

There is an acrid smell emanating from beyond the black portal.

Perhaps that old knuckle bone may be of use...

THE FOOL

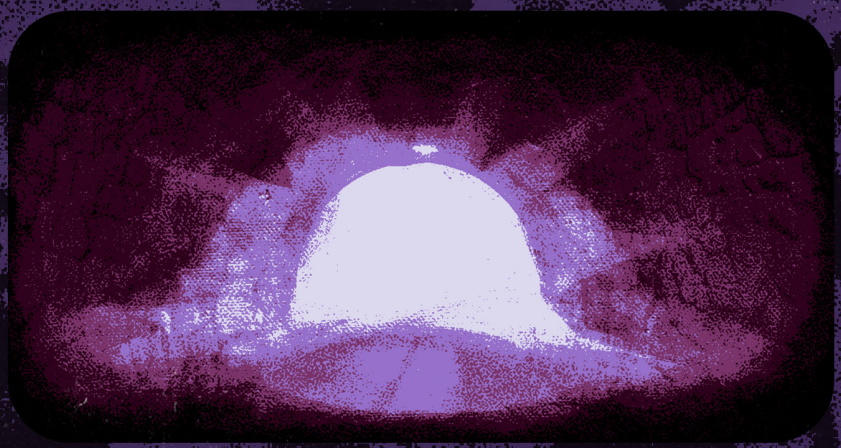
You are not alone in the dark...

Fear not friend! *Gaaahak* I will stop at nothing to keep you safe!

Kah-uuuccs, Kah-uuuccs, Kah-uuuccs! Eyes up... The moons are singing... Do you too... know them from your slumber?

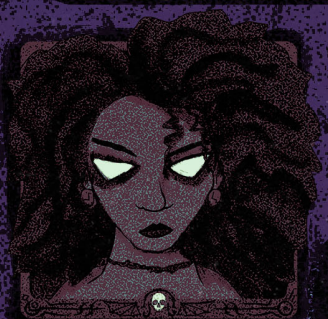
Memento Box

A small box packed with dust. It makes your nose itch. There are also some... threads, or... Worms?



The tunnel stretches into eternity, but you are saved when a dull light appears on the horizon.

You emerge from the tunnels and find yourself in the ruined town from before. It is barely recognizable as a village, as the current occupants seem to be foreign militants, and they look as if they have murder on their minds.



Well, here's hoping we are... Oh. It appears we are inside of that town... So much for bypassing the chaos...

Huh, could have sworn that tunnel went all the way to The Capital... *hrrrr* No matter! Stay behind me... It is best we utilize skulduggery. Kehehehe...

Warriors and camp followers swarm the ruins like flies. They seem filled with purpose but they aimlessly patrol; unfulfilled by their victory.

Guardsman

The rank and file of the Wailing Guard. These warriors come form various background, and most joined the guard to seek riches and glory in their crusade.

Redeemer

The heavy infantry of The Wailing Guard. These individuals have distinguished themselves due to their raw brutality as they achieve their rank after claiming a hundred tongues.

Shield Wall

An Akephalos wielding with two pavises strapped to their arms. These individuals joined The Guard with a noble purpose, but were deceived and serve as living bulwarks.

Skirmishers

The ranged infantry of The Wailing Guard. They are often employed as scouts and vanguard observers before the main forces. Curiously, they are forbidden from claiming tongues.

Wailing Clerics

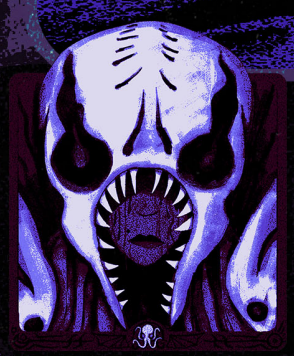
The inner circle of The Wailing Guard. These Mourners conduct lamenting rites and claim the tongues of the fallen. Some unknown arcana imbues their cries with the ability to nauseate their victims.

Moon Drawn

Shades that form out of dried pools of blood. They are drawn upwards toward the sky by Moon Threads. The wispy, iridescent currents pull their bodies gently up into the cosmos.

CAPTAIN ISSIKA

You manage to find a back way out of the town, but as you approach the small gate, a warrior drops from the walls above.



Hold traveler... I cannot let you pass. I am oath-bound to hold this ruin. Were things different I... No matter. You, too, shall not leave this accursed place.

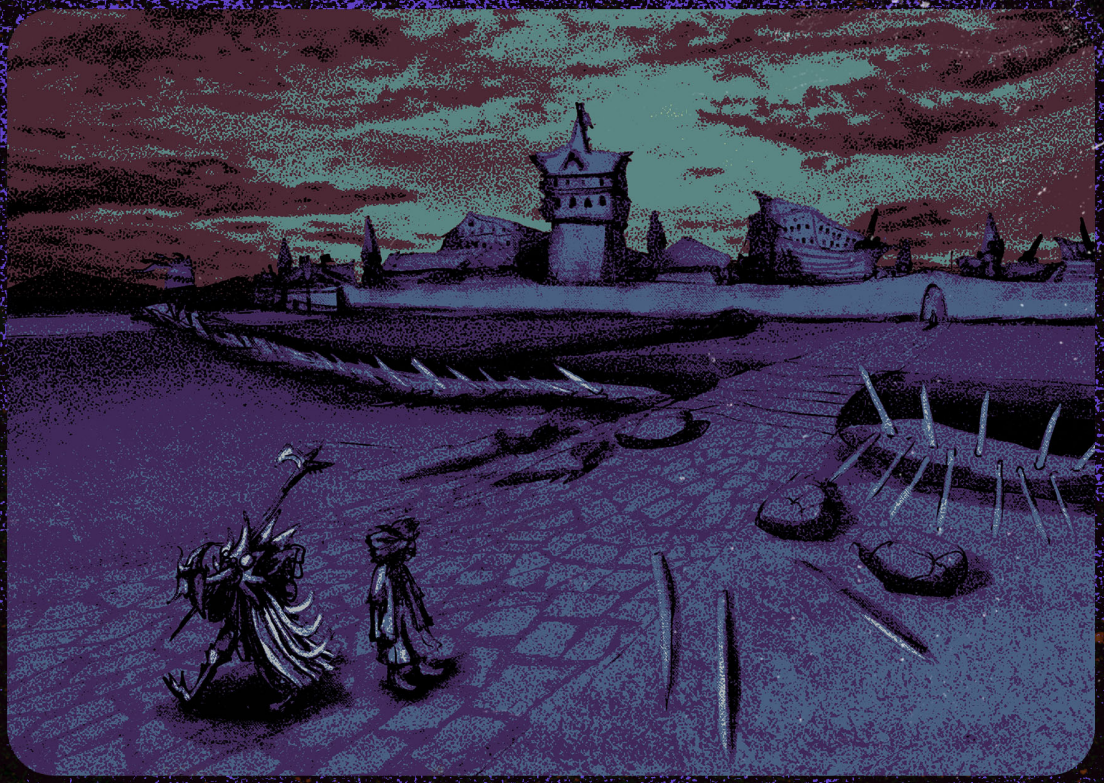
Precious Oath

A talisman crafted out of a severed tongue. It is moist and appears to be freshly acquired; cut by a mournful hand.

You manage to make it out of the blasted ruins as evening creeps over the land.

As you look back at the town, you view it in a new light.

Pity stirs within you.



The side road you follow leads you to the edge of a dark woodland.

The air feels heavy and as you approach, it feels like the trees themselves are reaching into your lungs and pulling out your breath.

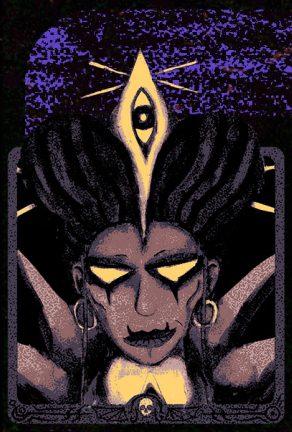
As you travel through, you pass a ravaged wagon that is being engulfed by... some sort of flora?

It seems inanimate, but there is a low hum emanating from it as you pass.

You come to an old pilgrim's shrine at a fork in the road.

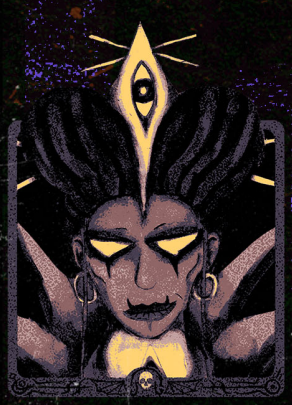
There is an individual standing near the shrine looming over the corpse of some unknown creature.

THE BLIGHTED PARAMOUR



Ahmmm? What have we here? You better not be hoping to travel further on this road. The stretch leading to the capital has some kind of military road block, and the other path to the swamps is swarming with... well, lets call them "brigands"; yea? Say, how about I join you? I can tell you and I are... kindred. We dolls ought to stick together in lands like these; no?

Hrrrmph... I don't like the stench of her. *Hehckik* Reeks of... weirdness.



Darling, those are my reagents you are smelling. I guarantee my "weirdness" is not the smellable sort.

PERSONAL EFFECTS

Mangled Claw

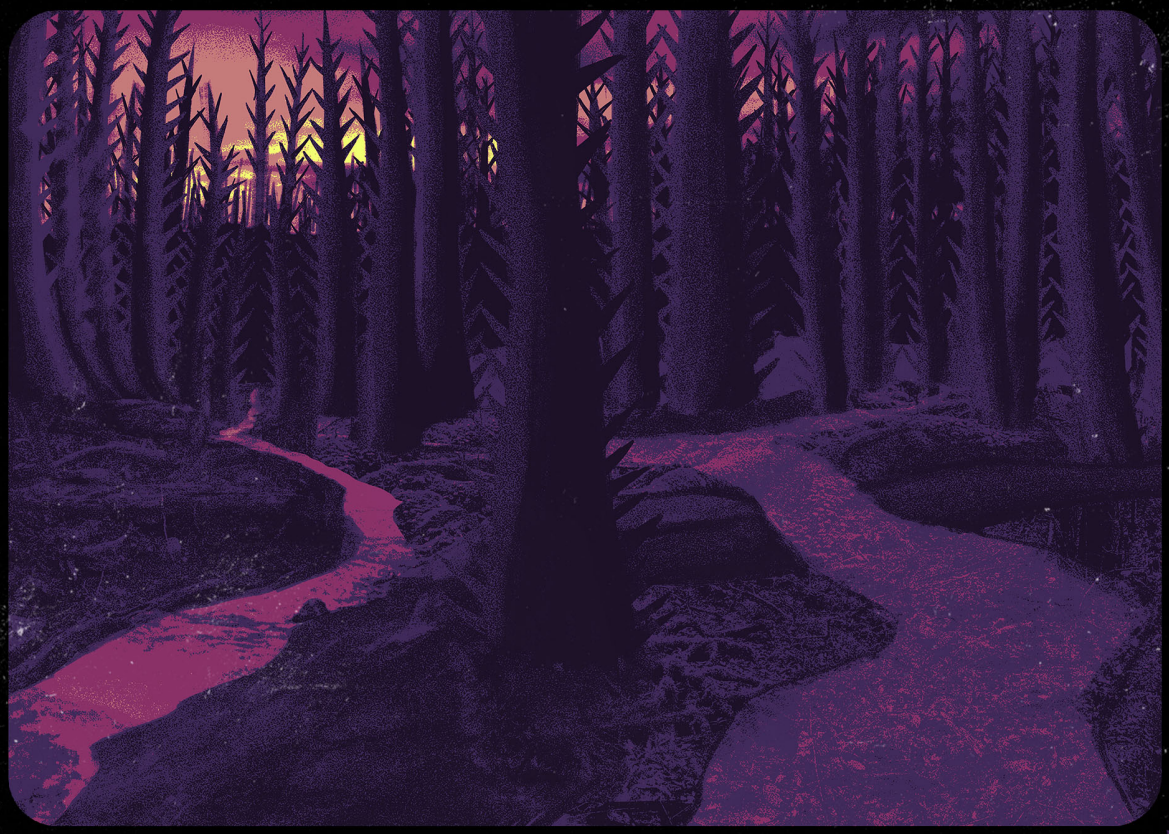
A desiccated and mangled talon of some sort. There is a metal tube attached to it, but it seems to have never been opened; sealed shut by some manner of hex.

Reagent Clutch

An orb shaped bag covered in ornate filigree. Its deceptively small interior is filled with a large assortment of exotic ingredients. It is pleasantly cool to the touch.

BURDEN:

It is not uncommon for Mourners of Drauss to have secret lovers. Coupling is strictly forbidden, but those pious men have... needs. The Blighted Paramour fulfilled the needs of one such cleric, until she was discovered. A respected Mourner and a witch of the Ambrosial Coven? It was a scandal of the highest order.



You leave the old road behind and make your way through the oddest woodland you have ever seen.

This forest is the opposite of the silent, suffocating woodland from before. The regular deciduous flora gives way to tall spiny spires, and the landscape chitters with life as eyes stare back at you from every nook and cranny.

Despite its alien nature, this wood feels... sacred to you.

You pass a tree that is illuminated by fragrant buds.

There are corpses impaled upon the plant, and a circle of bodies sit in a circle around it.

Some sort of ritual perhaps?

You do not know, but this feels beautiful to you.

The Woods are teeming with strange life and even stranger "un-life"... But you feel a strange sense of calm as you travel. Perhaps you have acquired a bias... They woods feel enchanting.

Skittish Mimic

A shy denizen of the woods, though they seem to enjoy following travelers closely...

Sightless Ambusher

An arboreal creature who has a habit of dropping out of trees onto their unsuspecting prey.

Ancient Predator

A gigantic Ibis cloaked in shadow. It seems to feed exclusively on the eternal Forest Rangers.

Silent Legion

Mysterious warriors who emerge from the ground in large numbers. They are not indigenous, and strangely, they pay simple travelers no mind.

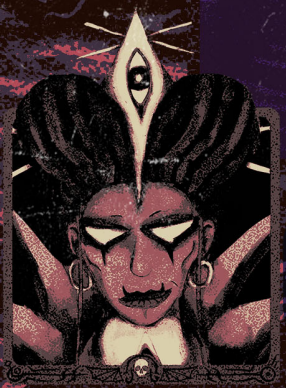
Sluggish Haunt

A slow moving spirit. If you run afoul of it, you may find that things take longer than they used to.

Immortal Rangers

Soldiers who took up an eternal oath to serve The Kings as the wardens of their sacred forest.

Eventually, you find yourself at a misty lake with a large chapel on its banks.



We should peek inside; yea? I have got a good feeling about this.

Inside the chapel, the pews are filled with silent figures. There is an altar, and upon it sits a strange bell.

Standing next to it is a robbed figure that turns to face you. As it does, so do all of the seated figures.

SINNER'S DEACON

Their eyes pierce through you as they sit motionlessly and you feel trapped in this moment. You are overcome with a desire to weep.... But what is that feeling... anger? Tears of... anger?

~~Foreigners... Do you also come to mock us? To laugh at those who mourn the spurned?~~

Heart Bell

A hand-bell shaped like a heart. It seems to be missing a uvula, and thus it makes no sound when swung. Mysteriously, it emits a low throbbing sound "thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump".

Broken Arrow

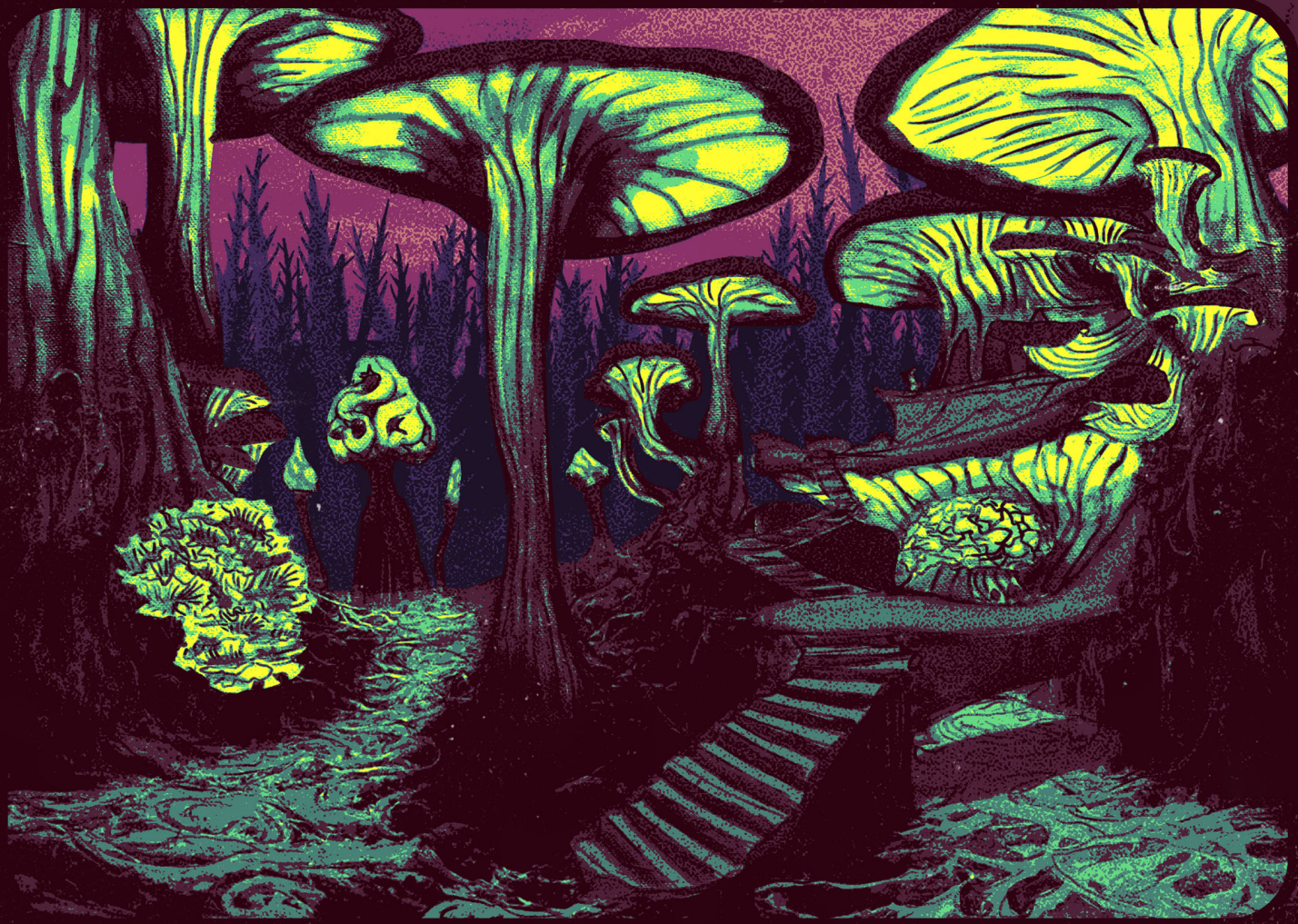
The snapped end of a white wooden arrow. There is writing near the fletching; "Though Zhayo'hm suffered the Gray Pox, You shall know no blight". Holding the arrow gives you a robust feeling.

As you travel through the woods, you notice strange corpses out in the open.

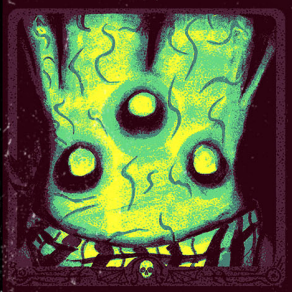
There is some sort of "weed" growing out of them...

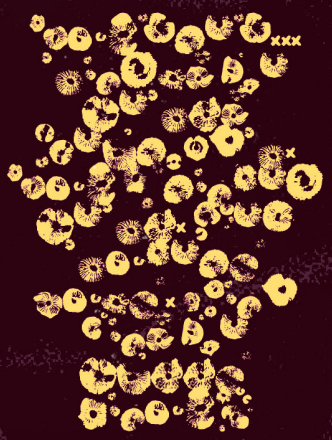
This phenomena feels malevolent to you and try to keep your distance from the bodies.

You continue on through the woods when something catches your eye. A glowing clearing nearby.



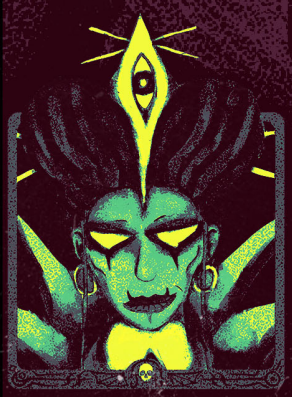
As you investigate, you notice that the glow is coming from gigantic glowing mushrooms. As you walk amongst the silent guardians, you start to get the impression that you are walking through a curated garden.





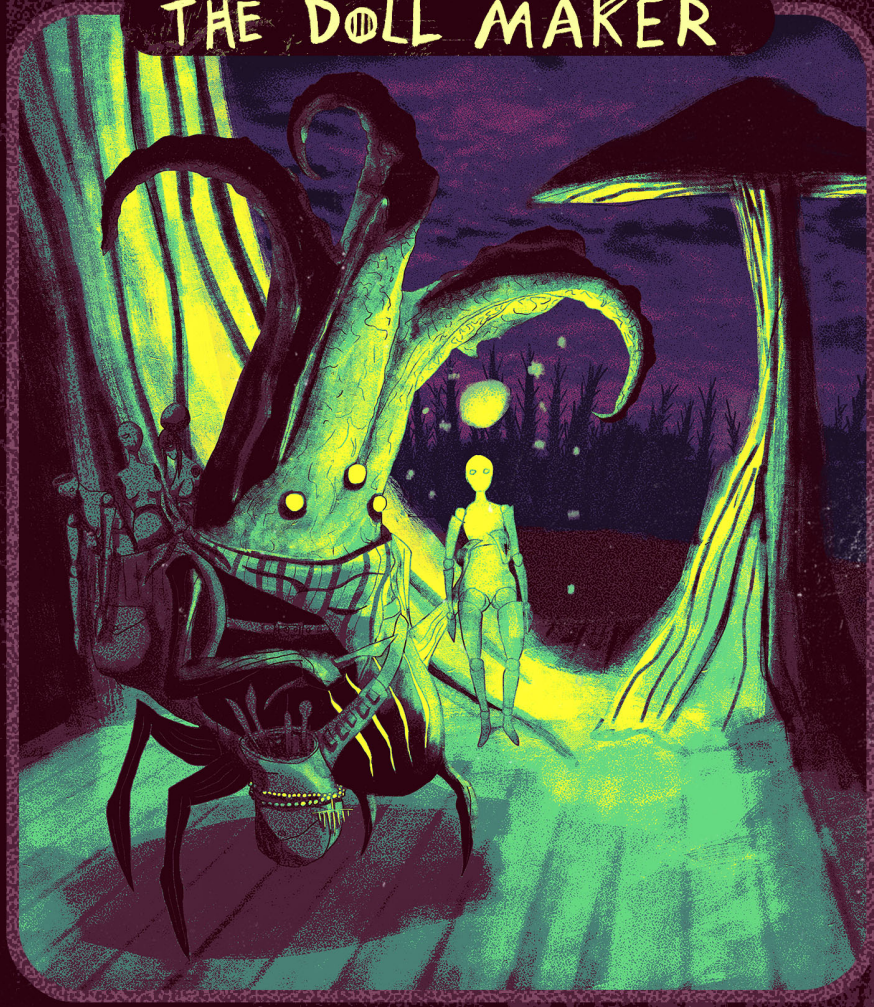
As you stroll in awe, you hear a soft scrapping sound. When you move towards it, you encounter a fungoid creature absorbed in a craft.

THE DOLL MAKER



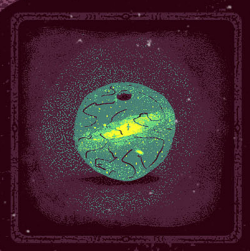
I... don't know about this one. There is something extremely... alien about their little glowing eyes...

Oh! No friend. *guurrg* The Bloom are extremely solid folk! I have never met one I did not get along with immediately! Though, *gillakriri* I sometimes have a hard time understanding what they are "saying"...



PERSONAL EFFECTS

Stardust Ball Joint



A mysterious see through ball joint. There is a mass of swirling stardust at its center and it emits a warm, welcoming light. Gazing upon it instills a fixation within you, and you have a primal desire to be there; amidst the dust, swirling in that serene void...

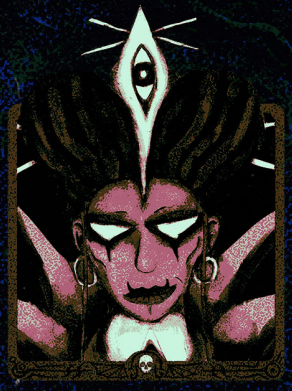
Tattered Daguerreotype

A tattered image of a family. It is incredibly worn and there is faded script on the back; most of which has been rendered illegible by the passage of time.

BURDEN:

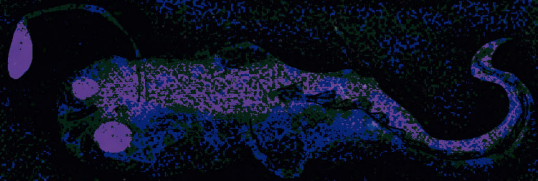
The Doll Maker, like most Bloom, longs for community. However, those who have an affinity for the cosmos find that their loneliness cannot be remedied by the company of others.

You come a small rocky rise at the edge of the forest, and find notice an abandoned outpost at its peak.



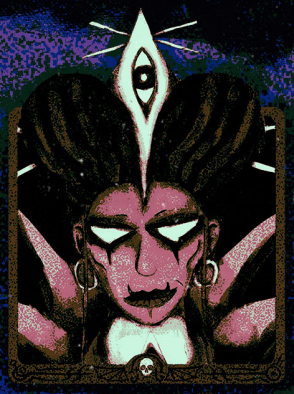
That looks like a firewatch post. It also looks unoccupied.

It is rather late, perhaps we could camp there for the night?



You've come to the edge of woods and can see the capital plateau. It seems that will be your next step.

There it is... The Capital...



Istepor... It is going to be very difficult to get inside, but I think I might have a way to get us in.

A plan huh? Fills me with dread coming from you... *Hrrrrr* But We will be fine! I believe we can do it! *grrrrr*. There is always a way through if we are resolved in our purpose!

I hope you are correct... What horrors will await us inside?

To be Continued...

HEX '24